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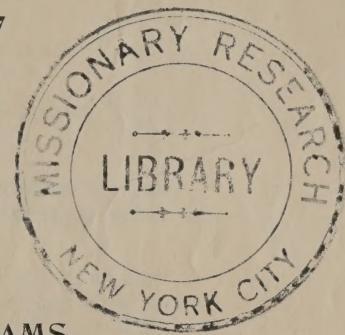
MS. 62

An Address Delivered at the Service of  
Remembrance and Thanksgiving for  
James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey, M.A.,  
D.D., Ph.D., Assistant Vice-Principal,  
Prince of Wales College, at Achimota  
on Sunday, 7th August, 1927

BY

THE REV. C. KINGSLEY WILLIAMS,

*Assistant Vice-Principal.*



GOLD COAST:  
Government Printer, Accra.

1927.

From A.B.S. Africa File, Box 4, 1926-29.



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"GOD IS NOT THE GOD OF THE DEAD BUT OF THE LIVING."

*St. Mark xii 27.*

We are met together in the presence of God to confess to one another, and to dedicate to Him that He may cleanse them, a great sorrow, a great pride and a great joy.

And truly we have cause for sorrow ; not so deep, I know, as hers that bore him, that nourished him, that watched him grow from child to boy, from boy to man, that let him go far over these a to seek knowledge and wisdom, and now is bowed with grief and four score years, '*and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world*'—pray for his mother, my friends ; and for his wife and children, four children, the youngest of them no more than nine months' old, whom he loved so, spoke so much of, laughed so gaily at the thought of seeing, with such glad hopes went back to,—pray for them.

For theirs is a greater sorrow than ours.

But we have been his pupils ; we have learnt from his flashing smile and almost superhuman energy of speech and action ; and we know we shall never again learn from a teacher of such infectious enthusiasm, such splendid vivacity.

Or we have been his colleagues, proud of his friendship, relying on his loyalty, relying never in vain, inspired by his counsel ; and we know that there is no one who can so help us understand our task, so forgive and repair and explain our blunders and our follies.

Or we have been fellow-servants with him of this Colony and its peoples, and we know, as we have been reminded, what a patriot, what an enthusiast has been taken from us.

What the loss of him will mean for Achimota is a thing we dare not think of yet. 'Irreparable,' 'irreplaceable,' are the words on everybody's lips ; and to all human seeming no other words suffice.

And all around us far away in remote bush villages there are simple folk, puzzled, anxious, living between two worlds '*one dead, the other powerless to be born,*' who feel that a light is quenched, a wall breached, a staff broken.

And far from Africa, in Europe and America there are thousands of quiet men and women who, knowing him only by rumour and the repute of books, yet sorrow with us this evening, because he is dead who for them was a symbol of a new hope in the new Africa that is being born.

We do well to be sorrowful.

*And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul.*

*The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places ; how are the mighty fallen. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle.*

But if human spirits walk the earth and visit the places that they love, his spirit, I am very sure, will haunt us, if we are sorrowful overmuch. *God is not the God of the dead but of the living.* In that faith he lived ; in that faith he died. He knew God. Jesus Christ had cast his spell upon him ; Jesus Christ had fascinated him by the magic of his love ; Jesus Christ had made him captive ; in that captivity he had found freedom.

Christ was for him more, far more, than Achimota, more, far more, than the Gold Coast and her peoples, more, far more, than Africa and all the world beside. If he were here, would he not have us smile through our tears ; is he not glad that our grief is shot through with joy and pride ?

I bid you, therefore, thank God with me for the virtues and graces of our friend.

No soul, we are told, is pure that is not passionate ; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic. How he loathed uncleanness ! With what a passion of longing he prayed that we, white and black alike, might be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Thank God for the passionate purity of his life.

Thank God, too, for his passionate energy. Beside him most men seemed, and many men felt, thin and ghostly and only half alive. A dynamic, almost a demonic, force possessed him. His house was next to mine : I know the life he lived. Up early, reading and writing through half the night, eating at the longest intervals, eating almost nothing even then, always working, never resting, constantly interrupted, he filled his crowded days with labour. And four times a month he would be away on long journeys to distant places where two days or three would be spent with every moment between exhausting speeches given to listening to more exhausting talk.

*See ! In the sands of the world  
Marches the host of mankind,  
A feeble, wavering line...  
Ah, but the way is so long !  
Years they have been in the waste ! ...  
Factions divide them, their host  
Threatens to break, to dissolve....  
Ah, keep, keep them combined ! ...*

*Then in such hour of need  
Of your fainting, dispirited race,  
Ye, like angels, appear,  
Radiant with ardour divine.  
Beacons of hope, ye appear !  
Languor is not in your heart,  
Weakness is not in your word,  
Weariness not on your brow....  
Ye fill up the gaps in our files,  
Strengthen the wavering line,  
Establish, continue our march  
On, to the bound of the waste,  
On, to the City of God.*

One other master passion dominated his life ; a passion for friendliness, for fellowship, for co-operation. He knew '*the love of love, the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn.*' He never despaired. And for despair he had more reason than any white man can ever understand, or any African who has never left West Africa. He had suffered because he was an African ; he had seen others suffer because they were Africans.

The background against which you may hope to catch a vision of what the powers of anarchy and hell lost when his great gifts were dedicated to peace and co-operation, that dark background is a slum in Johannesburg, a street in East St. Louis, a veiled courtyard in a Bengal town, an open space in Amritsar.

I myself once heard him tell a crowd of many hundred British students, how once he crossed a continent twice within three days to be present at a conference with two white friends ; and on both journeys had to sit up all night in the " Jim-Crow " car (as they infelicitously call it) because he was an African ; how when he was a member of an education Commission that promises to revolutionize African education he was refused admission to a public omnibus because he was an African ; how on a steamer going to England he had to sit at a table by himself alone, because he was an African. I myself saw those hundreds of men and women, a crowd as great as that which fills this hall to-day, begin to burn with rage and shame—the easy rage and shame of the untempted, perhaps :—and then

*'happy as a lover and attired  
In sudden brightness like a man inspired'*

he had us laughing with him at the folly of it all, lifting race and colour out of tragedy into comedy, and proving that by laughter and the grace of God the greatest menace of our modern world may yet become our greatest triumph.

One of the most exalted titles of His Holiness the Pope is " Sovereign Pontiff ;" and " Pontiff," some scholars think, means " bridge-builder." Our friend was, in this sense at least, a pontiff ; for ever throwing bridges across the gulfs and chasms that divide us, for ever calling to us to cross them, frail and dangerous as they are, to cross them in his company, and find new friends on the other side.

Is not that the meaning of his death for us ? His soul goes marching on, flaming on, loving on,—laughing on ; and heaven itself seems to some of us a friendlier, kindlier place because he is there, more homelike, with more happiness and laughter in it, because he is there ; filled with a fresh hope even—who knows ?—that the good purposes of God for his Africa and his world shall not always be frustrated, that some day—soon, please God—Twi and Fanti and Ga, white and brown and black, all tribes and races and nations, shall be (in the image he never wearied of repeating) as the fingers of a man's hand playing eternal music to the glory of God the Father.

